



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE COLLECTION OF MARYLAND FOLK-LORE.¹

THE Baltimore Folk-Lore Society has for its chief *raison d'être* the collecting of superstitions and tales still to be found existing in Maryland. This is an unexplored region, offering many inducements to seek for its scattered treasures; especially for those vestiges of a savage race and a distant land found among the superstitions of the colored people.

This object of collecting has always been kept before the members. Lists of suggestive topics were distributed at the close of our first year, in the spring of 1895. The next year, large tabulated papers were prepared for use in collecting tales; others were arranged for customs and sayings. We separated hopefully at the close of the season's work, expecting a good harvesting in the fall. But summer ease and folk-lore labors did not bring the anticipated results.

The next move was the usual recourse of a perplexed assembly, the appointment of a committee. This committee, composed of five, including the president, the secretary and the treasurer, met frequently in council, feeling that something was expected of them. But who would offer himself for this difficult work? Every one of us was occupied with professional duties or binding claims of society and home. Who would go out single-handed, to gather from the lips of the uninstructed folk the darling faiths and practices of their daily lives; and to do so by long, patient effort, helped by skilful address and pains to charm the secret from its jealous depths?

Time pressed. We knew that every day was causing us losses in traditional lore. We had heard of the rapid disappearance of tales in the Highlands of Scotland, in the thirty years between 1830 and 1860; for the minister had come to the Highlands, and the schoolmaster had followed close after. They had put a stop to the village gatherings, where old and young listened until daylight to the tales of a travelling tailor or shoemaker. "Not a tale since then have I heard," says Urquhart, a collector. "The old men had died or lost their memories, and the younger did not know the stories." Thirty years of education had wrought this loss of myth and fable.

Just such a condition is found here among the negroes. Since the war, they have had *their* thirty years of enlightenment. The old reeking driftwood from Africa is closely intermingled with our logs of European growth, and every day is carrying off some of those last old relics of the days of slavery, with their stores of folk-lore untold.

¹ Paper read at the Ninth Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society, Baltimore, December 29, 1897.

For present purposes, however, the committee had to devise something. Turning from past precedents and ideals, they addressed themselves to present possibilities, to recent methods, to the idea of a mighty, coöperative scheme, involving modern machinery and many workers, yet with limited demands upon the individual. Just such an organization was suggested to their minds; an organization already formed, trained, and in working order: the public school system with its two great departments of teachers and pupils, having ramifications reaching into every corner of the city, including every nationality within our boundaries, and lengthening out its lines throughout the State. The teachers have been addressed by our president at their bi-monthly meetings; and, with their invariable sympathy in all literary work, they have already responded in fair measure. We ask them to collect from their pupils, in the form of compositions, all the sayings, rhymes, games, and tales they know. They are to get these from their own stock, from their parents, grandparents, and others. The papers are to be handed over to our committee for comparison and arrangement. In order not to add to the labors of the teachers, we ask them to send in the papers without correction. We should like to know the nationality of the narrators' parents and their educational status and general environment, but this seems to be too much to expect from the schools just now. These plans have proved feasible. We have realized the fact that superstition lives in towns as in the country. It is only the long tales that die easily when one generation is interrupted in the telling to the other. A few of us have met occasionally during the past month or two, and have hurriedly looked over the mass of papers coming in, and have selected a few to quote from to-day.

So many repetitions of popular sayings occur, that we want to keep some running, statistical notes, to mark the universality of such. Sometimes the fiftieth repetition will add the reason for the faith or the cure for the evil. The white child is satisfied with telling you "It is bad luck to do this or that," "It is good luck to find something;" the negro tells what kind of bad luck follows, he gives the reason for the faith within him, and he tells how to avert the misfortune.

Cross-eyed people are always a cause of ill-luck to those meeting them; but the colored child says you may escape if the cross-eyed person "does not look at you;" or, if he does, you must "turn round three times;" if this should, perhaps, be too pointed, you may "cross your legs." Another slip suggests what we suppose a more private and delicate remedy, to "spit into your hat."

Leg crossing is often effective.

If you start on an errand and turn back, you should cross your legs to prevent bad luck.

The Virginia negro thinks dancing wicked, but that the wickedness may be abated, if not neutralized, by dancing without crossing the legs. (Vouched for by a member.)

The Anne Arundel County negro thinks it bad luck to turn a chair round on one of its legs. The evil is averted by turning it back again.

It is bad luck to stump your toes, unless you "suck your thumbs."

Explanations of the reason for bad luck add much to the interest and value of the superstition. A teacher at the Normal School mentioned, as one of the strongest impressions of her childhood, her mother's objection to sewing on Ascension Day. Several of the papers tell us that the sin lies in the fact that "every stitch pierces the Saviour's side." If you sew on Sunday, the stitches pierce his heart, and the devil will make you rip them out with your nose.

Spitting has great influence. If a schoolgirl's dress turns up at the bottom, spitting on the hem will give her a new dress. If the skirt turns up going downstairs and she fails to spit on it, she will miss her lessons.

Every school paper says stepping *on* the car track, not *over*, is a sure sign you will miss your lessons.

The modern idea of the car-track suggests the influence of the door-sill or threshold in folk-lore. A new door-sill keeps out witches. A bride must step *over* the threshold. A broom at your door forces the witch to count all the straws before daylight, thus keeping her outside the threshold.

Shaking hands over a fence is unlucky.

Many superstitions dwell on the evil of shaking a cloth out of doors after dark, sweeping a room after dark, or throwing any débris outside at night. The crumbs from the cloth will fall into the Saviour's eyes; the sweepings will sweep away all your wealth.

Turning back after starting is bad, though ill luck may be averted by counting seven and then sitting down.

Anything done backwards is bad.

Don't get into bed backwards.

A man must not sit with his face to the back of his chair.

Don't walk backwards; to do so is to curse your parents.

But this unnatural way of doing things may give you power to work love-charms.

"Ef yo places de sho ub yo's right foot to-ward yo sweetheart's house, en de lef foot's sho to-ward de church dat she mostly tends, en den wolk backwards, en count de jyces dat's in de celin', en gets into bed backwards, yo'll be shoah toe dream about her, ef she's de wun yu's gwineter marry."

Take your undergarment off at Halloween, wash it backwards,

dry it backwards, and then sit down before the stove backwards without speaking ; and if you are to marry, you will see your future husband come down the steps. If you are not to marry, you will see a black cat come down the steps, followed by four men carrying a coffin.

Or, walk *downstairs* backwards, carrying a mirror, and counting each step. At the thirteenth you will see the reflection of your future husband.

We may observe that it is walking *upstairs* backwards that is cursing, your parents.

One paper says it is good luck for a bride to carry bread in her pocket at the wedding. Another, that in Sweden she carries it, then throws it away, to prevent trouble. In Germany she carries it and eats it the first thing on reaching her destination, thus preventing homesickness.

A German lady arrived at Locust Point, and was driven immediately out to a country home at Catonsville, where, on the porch, before entering the house, she opened her bag, and, apologizing, eat a piece of home-made bread. This was to prevent homesickness at separation from her young children left in Germany.

Rheumatism is cured by wearing hogs' eye-teeth around the neck, or keeping a raw potato in the pocket.

To cure backache, the first time you hear a whip-poor-will in the spring, roll down hill backwards, and you won't have a backache for a year ; or, pick up a stone, spit under it, lay it down, and walk on without looking back.

For croup, stand the child with its back to a door and bore a hole over its head with a gimlet. Then cut off a bit of the child's hair and stuff it into the hole. As the child grows up above the hole, it will gradually be cured of croup.

To cure whooping cough, find a blackberry or raspberry bush whose top has been turned down and taken root, and make the patient crawl under it three times.

Meeting women first on Monday morning, on New Year's Day, or when starting on a journey, invariably brings bad luck.

In a certain neighborhood in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, among a large family connection, it used to be the custom to send off the young men early New Year's morning to call from house to house ; it was expected thus to anticipate the unlucky calls that might be made by women on that day.

If you watch a ship sail away, it will never return.

To dream of travelling is a sign you will be poor.

It is bad luck when starting on a journey to meet an old woman, a shaggy dog, or to break a shoestring.

If you wake in the morning with death mould on your hand (yellow spots on the palm), a dead man has shaken hands with you.

If, on waking, your hand is red, you have shaken hands with a ghost.

If, walking at night, a spider's web brush your face, you are being followed by a ghost. The same thing happening in the daytime means that a stranger is coming.

A horse can see ghosts.

It is good luck to receive money Monday morning before seven o'clock. This superstition suggests a connection with the Monday morning sales among the Jews, the cheapest prices being offered before ten o'clock.

It is a common belief that wet clothes must not be carried from one house to another.

To dream of fish is a sign of illness.

Visitors are announced in various ways. Dropping the dishcloth promises a slovenly visitor; dropping a knife promises a lady; a fork, a gentleman; while a spoon signifies that some one will come riding.

If your nose itches, a visitor is coming; right side, a man; left side, a woman; on top, some one will come riding.

Throw salt behind unwelcome visitors to keep them away.

It is bad luck to tender thanks for flowers. If you offer thanks for either seed or flowers, they will not grow.

To make cabbage seed grow, sow it in your nightclothes on March 17.

It is a general idea that the feet must not be higher than the head; shoes, therefore, must not be put on a chair, or table, or in any high position. Such a position brings disappointment.

To eat with your hat on shows you do not give the Lord thanks. (Evidently this is lack of reverence.)

If you can't unlock a door in a strange house, it shows you did n't say your prayers that morning.

No pancakes on pancake day, means no luck with chickens.

As a love-charm, throw a bit of pancake on pancake day to a rooster. If he eats it without calling the hens, you will remain single; if he calls them, you will marry.

Black cats are to be dreaded. Once in Anne Arundel County, the crews of seven shifting engines stopped work to kill a black cat seen in the yard. On another occasion, an engineer refused to take out a passenger train because a black cat had crossed the track. Being threatened with loss of his position, the engineer yielded, but before starting bade his fellow workmen farewell. The paper reports an accident to the train, occasioning the death of both engineer and fireman.

The blood from a black cat's tail cures warts.

A black cat or any kind of cat coming to your house is good luck.

Death superstitions are very numerous.

If a tree that has been standing alone for years in a field is cut down, one of the heads of the family will die. The tree may be killed, however, by digging round the roots or cutting them off; and if cut down then, no evil consequence will follow.

Many families have their special death warnings differing from the death tick. In some, old clocks that have not been wound for years are said always to strike just before a death.

The face of a corpse must never be in front of a mirror; it will destroy the quicksilver.

Cover all mirrors if a death occurs in a house; stop the clocks and muffle the bells.

Both ghost and death superstitions are full and explicit.

The neighing of a horse foretells death; the news will come from the direction of his head.

The negroes have a charming euphuistic way of meeting unpleasant facts. We see it often said that if you are struck by a broom, it is a sure sign you will go to jail. Our Baltimore jail and penitentiary are on East Madison Street. Hence this very local variant, —

If you are hit over the shoulders by a broom, it is a sure sign you will go to Madison Street College.

An unexplained expression declares that it is "Good luck to see Mr. Elephant swing on Mr. Rabbit's eye-tooth at the Three Nights' Ball."

The negroes have seized upon many European superstitions, which, now changed, exist as survivals; as that of "Chilmer's Day," or Holy Innocents'. No work can be begun that day. They will work late the night before to begin a new piece, rather than start it the next day. Their "Animal Christmas," when the cattle kneel in their stalls at midnight, on Old Christmas Eve, is a survival of an ancient belief.

We wish to keep in our possession, among our archives, as many as possible of the papers read at the meetings held every month. And for the many items of interest that are reported at meetings, it has been proposed to have a sort of card catalogue, as a record of what would otherwise be lost. Our members are supplied with pads of regular size, on which to write down rhymes, customs, and superstitions, to be handed in for the card collection.

Besides the collections being made through the schools of Baltimore, societies are being formed in the State for the systematic collection of the folk-lore in the counties.

A visit to Frederick last summer opened up an interesting line

for investigation. If the people of Frederick will respond to the expectations we are now indulging in regard to their wealth of traditional faiths, we shall soon have much valuable material to report.¹

From another organization at Earleigh Heights, Anne Arundel County, fine material is coming in. Here we have found a good collector, Miss Mary Speers, from whose folk-tales I select the following:—

THE ORIGIN OF THE BLACK MAN.

Once 'pon a time ole Nick got lonesome down en his dominyun, so he tho't, "I'll go up an' pay a visit on yarth en see how 't is up dar;" so hup 'e come, en de fust t'ing he seed wuz a ape. "Lo'd a mussy!" sezee, "wat kind o' man is dis? I hain't got none o' dem kind down in my quarters," sezee, "en dat'll neber do 't all." So up 'e prances ve'y pompous like, en sezee, "Howdy!" en de ape, he say nuthin' 't all; en 'e keeps on axin' heeps o' questions, an' de ape, he say nuthin'; den he keeps on wid mo' questions, an' de ape, he say nuthin' all de time. Den Mr. Satin, he,—he storm, storm, an' den he cussed de ape—en lo en 'old! de ape, den an' dar, he tu'n to a brack man. En dat's how de w'ite man done count fer de nigger bein' on yarth.

HOW THE NEGRO GOT THE NAME OF COON.

Dar wuz once a slaveholder who 'ad five 'undred slaves, en 'e had one 'e thought heeps ob, en 'is name 'uz John; so dis yere John, wen 'e thought dar wuz anything his marster wanted, 'e'd tek it en go hide it, so 'is marster could n't find it; en 'is marster 'uld hunt round en ax de yudder slaves, en dey could n't fin' it. Den 'e 'd ax John, en John 'uld put one han' in 'is pocket, en scratch 'is head wid de yudder han' en say, "Wait a minute, marster, lemme t'ink." Den 'e 'd say, "Marster, come, I t'ink I kin tell yo' rite whar's it; I's a forchune tellar, I is;" en he rite en put 'is han' on it. So 'e keeps up fo' years, ebery t'ing wuz de same way, en de marster thought 'e wuz sho' nuff forchune tellar. So one day de marster wuz at some kiner high feast 'r yuther, en dar wuz a hole lot o' high folks, wealthy gemmuns, an' dey gotter bettin'; en dis yere gemmun, de marster, bet dey could n't name nuffin dat dis John ob his'n could n't tell whar's it. So dey keeps on a bettin' twell de marster bet twell 'e'd bet all 'is property, all 'is slave; he did n't hab nuffin lef'.

¹ News has just been received from Frederick telling that folk-lore collections among the schools have been begun by a few of the teachers. (We are especially glad to report that a Folk-Lore Society has been formed at Annapolis, which is a rich field for the collector. This society was formally organized in October, and is now in good working order, having regular meetings, and being composed of representative people, some of whom have long been studying and collecting folk-lore, merely for their own enjoyment.)

Den dese yudder gemmuns said dey'd git one ob dese yere rat-coons ; en de marster sed 'e did n't keer, dey could git anythink dey choose, so dey cotch a rat-coon en put hit under a bar'l on de lawn. Den dey sont fer John en 'e come, en de marster sed, "Look yere, John, I's done bet my forchune on yo' now. I want chew ter tell usuns wat's under dat ar bar'l dar." En cose John did n't know, case 'e 'ad n't put hit dar hisself ; en 'e'd allers hid de yudder tings ; en 'e sed : "Deed, Mars' Jones, John's sick ; 'e can't tell no forchunes terday." But de marster, he sisted, en sed, "John, I wants ye toe ; I's bet my whole forchune on yo." "But, deed, Mars' Jones, I's sick terday, I is ; en can't tell no forchunes terday," sez John, sezee. "I know, John, but yo' must do hit," sez de marster, sezee. Den John keeps on a foolin' dat way, 'e duze, twell presently de marster sey, sezee, "Ef yo' don't tell me wat's under dat ar bar'l, I'll make it rite wid you." Den John know ef 'e did n't tell wat wuz under dat bar'l 'is marster ud kill 'im. So 'e thought, "John, hit's all up wid you ;" fo', ob cose, 'e did n't know wat's under dat bar'l, kase 'e did n't put hit dar.

Well, de nigger, 'e'd been en de habbit-ob callin' hissef "coon ;" so 'e went to de bar'l, en helt 'is arms up ober de bar'l, en sez, sezee : "Rite yere, on dis bar'l, yose done got dis coon dis day ;" en fell postrated. Den dey all shouted an' cheered, en de marster pick 'im up on 'is shoulders, en run round en round wid John, kase 'e'd won all dat money fer 'im. En ebber sence dat dey de nigger's always been called de "coon ;" en dey allers takes hit as a good luck name, fo' it done sabe one nigger life.

HOW MR. HARE PROVED THAT MR. FOX WAS HIS RIDING-HORSE.

Der wuz two girls, en Mr. Fox en Mr. Har' wuz a co'tin' wun dem, dey wuz dere two esco'ts ; en ebery time Mr. Har'd go ter seed de girls, en Mr. Fox wuz n't dar, dey'd keep er axin' him, "Whar's Mr. Fox ?" en tellin' him 'bout Mr. Fox, dat Mr. Fox sez dis, en Mr. Fox sez dat. So Mr. Har' kinder crossed his lags, en sed, "Yo's all keeps a talkin' 'bout Mr. Fox. Mr. Fox is my ridin'-hoss in wed wedder," en de girls did n't bleeb him. So w'en Mr. Fox comes de nex' day, deys tole 'im 'bout hit, en w'at Mr. Har'd done sed ; so he goes back ter Mr. Har's en gits arter 'im 'bout hit. En Mr. Har' sed he did n't sez so, de girls wuz a makin' fun ub 'im, en sed to Mr. Har', "Come, let's go down dere termorrow en prove hit dem." So Mr. Fox sez all right, en w'en de nex' mornin' come, Mr. Har' tole Mr. Fox dat 'e wuz sick en could'n walk dere. So den Mr. Fox sed 'e tote 'im ; en Mr. Har' sed all right, but 'e must hab a saddle fer to hole himse'f on by. So Mr. Fox sed he'd git all ub dem den, but 'e 'atter get off w'en dey wuz neah dar, and Mr. Har' sed

all right. En whilst Mr. Fox wuz a giten' deze udder thinks, Mr. Har' wuz scredden' a pa'ar spurs 'bout 'is pussin, en w'en Mr. Fox come he gits on, en way dey goes. D'reckly Mr. Fox sez, "What yo' doin', Brer Har'?" "I dis ez fixen' my foot in de sturip, Brer Fox." Presen'ly Mr. Fox sez, "W'at's yo' doin', Brer Har'?" "Nufin' but turnin' my pant leg down," and all de time he wuz a puttin' on de spurs. Presen'ly de got neah ter de house, en Mr. Fox sez, "Git down," en Mr. Har' sez, "Oh, please take me a little bit farder. I's so monstus weak I can't git along." So Mr. Fox went on twill he got neahly ter de house, den Mr. Fox sed, "Now git down," and wid dat Mr. Har', he slapped dem spurs inter 'im, en came plump down on him wid dat switch, en made Mr. Fox go a flyin' down de road, right pass de gerls do'; 'en Mr. Har' holler out, "See, ladies; I don tole you dat Mr. Fox wuz my ridin'-hoss," en de gerls laf twill dey putty nigh cried, en Mr. Har' he jumped right off at de do', en Mr. Fox wuz so 'sulted, en mity cut up like, dat he des kept right on down de road to de wood, en waited twill Mr. Har' come 'long. En arter Mr. Har' sit en talk wid de gerls, he went on down de road; he knewed what's comin', en Mr. Fox comes out en grabs Mr. Har', en sez he's gwinter kill 'im. Mr. Har' sez, "Oh, please don't kill me now, Brer Fox, en I'll show yo' war's some honey." Den Mr. Fox t'inks he'll find out whar's de honey fust. So Mr. Har' takes 'im to de bee tree, en tells 'im to put his head in de holla' en he'p hisse'f; and whilst Mr. Fox wuz a tryin' to eat de honey, de bee stung 'im so, twill 'is head dun 'menced to swell, so dat he couddent git it outer de holla', so 'e den tole Mr. Har' to please to go a'ter de Docto'. En Mr. Har' wen' off down ter de branch en rolled en skipped en jumped, en rolled en skipped en jumped, en rolled en skipped en jumped; en den come back en tole Mr. Fox dat de Docto' sed dat he could n't come, en sed de Docto' sed, "Whar han's can't go, de head's no bizness." Den Mr. Fox 'menced to beg Mr. Har' ter please go back arter de Docto', en Mr. Har' sed, "I yeahs a pack o' hounds." So den Mr. Fox juck 'is head outer de holla en t'ow 'is head all up, en dat wuz de last ub 'im, en Mr. Har' did n't 'mit no mudder edder.

There remains now only a moment in which to speak of the rare opportunities offered in Maryland for the study of folk-lore.

A glance at the map will help us to follow out the many different nationalities represented in the State by the descendants of the early settlers. There are several distinct national types, unique in their history; and they have continued so long in their original settlements as to seem almost indigenous to the soil. Maryland, by reason of the religious freedom allowed under her charter, was the refuge of multitudes of all sects and nationalities. We have now

among our population descendants of Germans, Bohemians, French, Dutch, Swedish, Swiss, Irish, Scotch, English, Africans, and also a degenerate island population in the Chesapeake.

Beginning at St. Mary's, we have the first settlement by English Roman Catholics in 1634. At Annapolis, in 1649, was a settlement of English Protestants, refugees from Virginia. Frederick County, laid out in 1745, covered three fourths of the land area of the province, and was composed of German, Irish, and Scotch settlers. The German element has prevailed since the days when Thomas Schley, the schoolmaster, in 1735, led the one hundred families of the Palatinate into permanent possession of this region. Frederick County is now rich in folk-lore faith and practice.

As early as 1681, we learn of the erection in Cecil County of Bohemia Manor, bought by Augustine Herman, of Bohemia, the first man in the colonies to receive papers of naturalization. Later, he sold some of his land to Dutch and French Labadists, Protestant refugees from Europe, whose names exist to this day in Cecil. Thomas H. Bayard and other prominent men have sprung from these Labadists and Bohemians. Into Cecil County came Swedes, Norwegians, and Dutch across the Delaware, living at Swedestown. Quakers of Penn's settlement were thrown into Maryland by the new boundary of Mason and Dixon's line; while one fourth of the original Welsh tract is now in Cecil County.

Into Carroll County came Scotch-Irish settlers; and Talbot imported between six and seven hundred Irish and British to the Eastern Shore. Lower down were Welsh again.

Five shiploads of Acadians were landed in Maryland, helpless and destitute. These were French Catholics, while those of Bohemia Manor were Protestant. Quakers came to Montgomery County, driven from other provinces, but finding home and honor here.

Scattered through the two "Shores" are the negroes of Maryland. And lastly, in the islands of the Chesapeake we find a population of ignorant sailors and fishermen, descendants of a more prosperous stock; they are now sunk in poverty and superstition; and, consequently, they offer a good collecting ground to the lover of folk-lore. Thus in the State of Maryland we find original names still surviving in each county, proving an uninterrupted descent through two hundred and fifty years. And, as superstition always lives, we find abiding with us the sayings and beliefs of these earliest settlers. This unbroken line of myth and fable in Maryland may be easily connected with its European starting points; whence other students may follow it backward to the more distant origins of our folk-lore, the Aryan myths of Asia, or the negro tales of Africa.

Mrs. Waller R. Bullock.